

AN ESSAY

UPON THE

GHOST-BELIEF OF SHAKESPEARE.

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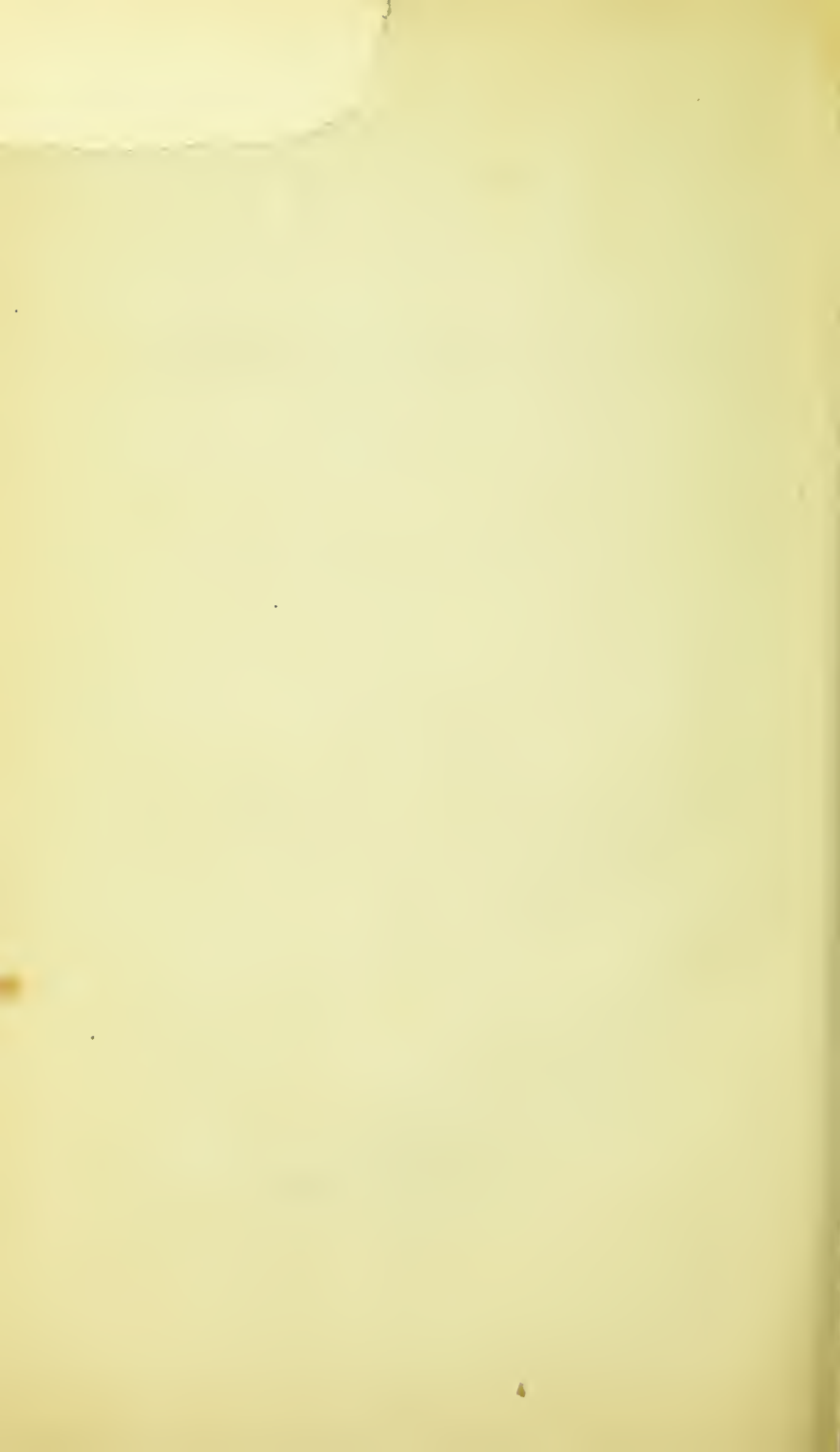
"They say, Miracles are past, and we have our philosophical persons, to make *modern and familiar*, things *supernatural and causeless*. Hence is it, that we make trifles of terrors, and *ensconce ourselves into seeming knowledge*, when we should submit to an unknown fear.

SHAKESPEARE.

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INTRODUCTION.

To disbelieve in the Objective Reality of Spiritual Appearances in general is the rule of the present age, and is conceived to be one of the marks and consequences of its intellectual progression; and therefore is it, we think, to be accounted for, that the above subject has never (at least as far as is known) been treated of. Most of Shakespeare's admirers doubtless imagine that such an intellect as his, could never have given credence to a Ghost; nor are they very curious to ask, how it was, *on Artistic grounds*, that the greatest Poet should have produced what many think his greatest work, upon a supernatural theme, or, in other words, upon a theme whose basis is either Nervous Disease, Credulity, or Imposture; for into some one of these things are all Ghosts now resolved.

If, however, the modern philosopher holds it to be part of *his* appreciation of Shakespeare, that he could not have believed in a Ghost, it is also certain that the Ghost-be-

lieving Student of the Poet-Philosopher, will claim him as a Teacher on spiritual ground, and will at least endeavour to show cause why he does so. Holding that Ghost-Belief, rightly understood, is most rational and salutary, he will deem that it must have had the sanction of such a Thinker as Shakespeare.

If there is any one principle which ought to be specially adhered to above all others in any speculations regarding Shakespeare's opinions, it should surely be never to adduce a mere *Opinion*, exprest by one of his Characters, as *his Opinion*. Of those who do so, it will probably be found, that, to use Horatio's expression, they do but "*botch the words up to fit their own thoughts.*" In the essay now made to show that Shakespeare apart from his Feelings as a Poet, believed as a Philosopher, in Supernatural Realities, no support to the idea will be sought from such means. Of course, such attempts must be held as equally illegitimate on the opposite side, and it does indeed seem wonderful that any real admirers of Shakespeare, could ever make such attempts, since they may know that it is very easy so, to attribute anything, even the most contrary things, to the Author, as witness, for example, the dialogue between Posthumus and the Jailer, in Cymbeline.

Nothing, indeed, is easier, than for an Author merely to make his Characters express *opposite opinions*, without having any fixt opinion or clear knowledge of his own, on the matter in hand ; but *it is quite another thing* so to state the opinion as to involve his own knowledge. In attempting this, every one conversant with any given subject, knows how instantaneously ignorance is detected where it exists.

We are told that Law-terms, Sea-terms, &c., are used by Shakespeare in a manner that implies real knowledge of more than the mere existence of the words. So the

Ghost-Believer looks at Shakespeare not to see what *opinions* are exprest about Ghosts, but whether what is *said* by the Characters, or *done* in the Story, implies that the Author possest a Philosophy of the Subject.

Here perhaps our Seeptical friends will smile at the mere idea of a Ghost-Believer's Philosophy: Nevertheless, they must be assured, that if we are mad, we do at all events claim to have, "a method in our madness." For instance, a Ghost Believer would say that the Story of Hamlet *might* be a hard fact, as much as the Story of Tom Jones might be one. He believes, and can therefore think that Shakespeare might have believed: 1st. That Ghosts do appear *objectively*. 2nd. That several persons at once may see a Ghost. 3rd. That one person may, and another may not, as with Hamlet and the Queen. 4th. That the ends for which Ghosts may appear may be good, bad, or indifferent; may succeed or may fail; and that there is both Faet and Philosophy for all this: So much received, we may believe in Hamlet.

If we are told that the Men who can believe all this, can believe anything, we say, No! For example, we could not believe in such a story as that of Frankenstein and the Monster, whom he is represented as in some sense, creating. We should say that such a thing, *as a hard fact*, was altogether contrary to the Laws, both of the Spiritual and Natural Worlds, and we are quite certain, that *so understood*, the writer did not believe in the like of it. Such stories therefore, we conceive to be essentially *Faulty Art*, whatever talent may be shewn in their execution.*

* It is not forgotten that there are works in which the Images are professedly *Allegorical*, but this little essay does not pretend to touch upon them. They, however, have their *True and False*, as well as those which are professedly *Literal*.

THE MEANING OF GHOST-BELIEF.

We will now then proceed to state what is meant by Ghost-Belief, and what are its supposed grounds. In the first place then, the Ghost-Believer conceives it to be a great truth, that every human being is truly and properly, *a Ghost*, clad for a time in an earthly body. Whether Shakespeare thought this or not, he has very beautifully exprest the Idea, in "*Twelfth Night*," when he makes Sebastian say,

"A Spirit I am indeed,
But am in that dimension grossly clad,
Which from the womb I did participate." *Act 5, Scene 1.*

Altho' it has been assumed above, that no *opinion* exprest by one of the Poet's Characters is to be quoted as *his opinion also*, yet any piece of wisdom, or of thought, as distinguished from an opinion, may be called his wisdom, or his thought. Now if it should be deemed that no *wisdom* is contained in a given passage, say the one just quoted, still the fact remains, that the Ghost-Believer's thought has been so felicitously exprest, and that too in a place where Shakespeare might just ~~has~~ easily have made Sebastian answer more like a modern philosopher, by saying that he was "*not a Spirit, but a real Man of flesh and blood*." The character of Sebastian is one which justifies us in concluding, that of two possible answers, Shakespeare would assign to him the one which he himself considered as *the most sensible*. The same thought is found likewise in Lorenzo's speech in the "*Merchant of Venice*" (*Act 5, Scene 1*), wherein he discourses of the harmony which is in "immortal Souls," but which we cannot hear, because "this muddy vesture of decay, doth grossly close it in."

In the next place, and this is a point of the highest importance, the Ghost-Believer holds, that the Ghost, which is truly the Man, *is in a Human Form*, as much as the body is; the body being in that form, solely because the Ghost or Soul is so. Men instinctively personify the Virtues and Vices by Human Forms: Ask the painter to delineate Revenge and Mercy, and he will, as a matter of course, present you with a male and a female figure, in which Revenge and Mercy will be depicted, *not merely in the expression of the heads*, but in the whole *formation* of the body, and in the *action* of every part. If the Artist be competent to paint what he and every one else *feels*, all will *know* his meaning. That every ruling Passion affects and shapes the whole body, is conceived by the Ghost-Believers to be an irresistible argument for the Human Form of the Ghost or Soul, and the idea has been expressed by Shakespeare in his usual masterly style; it should also be well noted, that he has assigned the thought to the wise and observing Ulysses. Speaking of Cresida, Ulysses says,

“Fie, fie upon her!
There’s a language in her eye, her cheek, her lip,
Nay, *her foot speaks*; *her wanton spirits look out*
At every joint and motive of her body.”

Again, how common is it for us to say of some one, who at first sight, we thought ordinary, or even ugly, but afterwards find to be amiable, that we lose sight of the bodily defect, and become conscious of a pleasing, and in some instances, even of a beautiful expression; a thing inconceivable on any ground, but the Human Form of the Ghost, or Soul; a form beautiful if the moral state be good, ugly if it be bad, which is again exemplified in the diabolical expressions sometimes perceived in faces naturally handsome. In both instances the beautiful and the

ugly Ghost or Soul, shines thro' the external, earthly countenance, and actually, when the good or evil feeling is at work, *alters the very form* of that external countenance.

These general facts Shakespeare has exactly painted in Desdemona's words.

"I saw Othello's Visage in his Mind."

The common expression, that we *see the mind in the face*, of course conveys a truth, or rather a part of the truth, but Desdemona's words are fuller; they give the fact that the *Mind has a Visage of its own*. This is to be taken as an absolute truth, which is also the reason why it is poetical. To say that anything can be really *poetical*, and yet *not true*, is a mere contradiction. Shakespeare did not so express Desdemona's feelings by accident; we must think that what in the most of persons is simply *felt*, was, by him, also most *dearly seen*.

The doubt or denial of the great truth, that the Human Soul has the Human Form, which "is a combination and a form indeed," places the Doubters in the most distressing dilemmas. They call their doubts and denials, Philosophy. but what Philosophy can that be, which deals only in Negations.*

* For example, hear Sir Walter Scott, in his Demonology:—

"Philosophers might plausibly argue, that when the Soul is divorced from the body, it loses all those qualities which made it, when clothed with a mortal shape, obvious to the organs of its fellow men. *The abstract idea of a Spirit certainly implies, that it has neither substance, form, shape, voice, or anything which can render its presence visible, or sensible to human faculties.* But these sceptic doubts of Philosophers, on the possibility of the appearance of such separated Spirits, do not arise till a certain degree of information has dawned upon a country, and even then only reach a small proportion of reflecting and better informed members of Society.

SHAKESPEARE'S IGNORANCE.—DR. ALDERSON.

Dr. Alderson was the Author of an Essay upon Apparitions, in which, as usual, he refers Apparitions to a diseased state of the Brain, and after stating his cases, expresses himself thus :—

“From what I have related, it will be seen why it should happen, that only one at a time ever could see a Ghost, and here *we may lament that our celebrated Poet*, whose knowledge of Nature is every Englishman's boast, *had not known such cases, and their causes*, as I have related ; he would not then, perhaps, have made his Ghosts visible and audible on the stage. Every expression, every look, in Macbeth and Hamlet, is perfectly natural and consistent with men so agitated, and quite sufficient to convince us of what they suffer, see, and hear ; but it must be evident that the disease being confined to the individual, such object must be seen and heard only by the individual ”

Thus far Dr. Alderson. Nevertheless, that Shakespeare, both in his Macbeth and in his Hamlet, has shewn himself fully conversant with the Disease Theory, the following passages will evince.

“MACBETH. Is this a dagger which I see before me,
The Handle toward my Hand ? come, let me clutch thee :
I have thee not, and yet I see thee still.
Art thou not, fatal vision, sensible
To feeling, as to sight ? or art thou but
*A dagger of the mind, a false creation,
Proceeding from the heat-oppressed Brain ?*”

Again, Lady Macbeth exclaims—

“O proper stuff!
This is the very painting of your fear.”

Also, the Queen in Hamlet—

“ This is the very coinage of your brain,
This bodiless creation ecstasy
Is very cunning in.”

Seeing then that Shakespeare did know of such a theory as Dr. Alderson's, a few remarks will be offered upon it. According to that theory then, we are to think that Disease is the *efficient cause* of Apparitions. Now, let it be observed, that *an eye*, in the course of nature, is the organ of seeing. Forms and colors seem to require *an eye*, on which they shall be imprest, in order that they may be seen. But here we have a set of cases in which certain Forms and Colors become visible which yet are evidently not imprest upon the Retina of the bodily eye, and then the conclusion is at once jump't at, that they are mere Images in the brain, having no Objective Reality whatsoever. Nay, more, it must be a *diseased brain*. It does not avail for you to point out, that in many cases the visions are beautiful to the eye, and also that beautiful Music is perceived, which seems to require an Ear: all must be referred to *Disease* as the *efficient cause*. Such are the things which the Incredulous can bring themselves to believe. Beautiful Forms and beautiful Sounds, tho' in themselves *essentially Order*, are thus held to spring from *Disorder*.

All this, however, is only *assertion*, and no *real reason* has yet been given why the Apparitions and the Sounds should not be impressions upon the Ghostly Eye and Ear, and from objects in the Spiritual World, which is the proper habitation of the Ghost, as the material world is of the body “ the gross dimension,” “ the muddy vesture of decay.”

Dr. Alderson begs the question altogether when he asserts that Apparitions are never seen but by one person at a time, and that one in an abnormal state. But grant

that it were so, that would not at all touch the question of the Objective Reality. Why should not the Disease be the *occasional* cause only, and not the *efficient* one. In nervous states, the senses which deal with the external world are often so highly raised, that, for instance, a conversation taking place in a remote part of the house, shall be heard perfectly, which could not have been heard at all had the person been in a normal state. So the Disease, disturbing for awhile the harmony between the Ghost and the body, causes the former to have its perceptions more or less opened, to the objects of its own proper world.

Again, when *real Objectivity* is spoken of, it must never be forgotten, that even in the material world *there are very different kinds of Realities*, and this is a point which we have never seen at all met, or, apparently, even dreamt of, by the skeptics. A Phantasmagoria is *real*, yet not *really* what it seems to be; and a Portrait is a *real* representation of a man, altho' it is not a *real* Man. Now allow that the Spiritual World, being also the world of Causes, must, as such, have *its* real representations of its Realities, and all the difficulties attendant upon waking or other dreams, will fast begin to vanish. In the meanwhile, we may rest assured of one thing: namely, that whatever Shakespeare has done, it has not been from such ignorance as Dr. Alderson has attributed to him.

SHAKESPEARE AND HIS SPIRIT OF INQUIRY.

We have seen then, that it was certainly not from *ignorance* on Shakespeare's part, that in his great work he has a Ghost who is visible, not only to one, but to three persons at once. Perhaps it was from *knowledge*, for how is it possible to believe that so great an Artist did not use every means for *thinking justly* upon supernatural themes, *while writing* upon them, to say nothing of the possibility of his even having had experimental evidence in his own person. However, be that as it may, he well knew what the true Spirit of Inquiry should be. Hamlet's words,

"There are more things in heaven and earth, Horatio,
Than are dreamt of in our Philosophy"

are continually quoted, but I would call special attention to the lines immediately preceding these. When Horatio exclaims,

"O day and night, but this is wondrous strange,"

Hamlet makes this fine rejoinder,

"And therefore as a stranger give it welcome."

A piece of advice utterly at variance with the feelings and practice of all the persons who write against the supernatural or indeed anything else that to them seems *strange*.

To the Ghost-Believers it appears that the true Spirit of Inquiry is embodied in this single line. *Welcoming* the strange fact, gives it its chance of being admitted as a Truth, if it really be such: *Welcoming it as a stranger* will secure us from being ultimately imposed upon. We believe that Shakespeare, as a Philosopher and an Artist, acted upon the Axiom he has assigned to Hamlet, and we lament that *the very contrary* is the almost universal practice.

SHAKESPEARE AND "OUR PHILOSOPHICAL PERSONS."

In "All's well that ends well," Shakespeare has made the old Lord, Lafcu, exactly characterize that unphilosophical Skepticism, which sets itself above the wise Axiom allotted to Hamlet; at the same time he administers a grave rebuke.

"LAFEU. They say, Miracles are past, and we have our philosophical persons, to make *modern and familiar*, things *supernatural and causeless*. Hence is it, that we make trifles of terrors, and *ensconce ourselves into seeming knowledge*, when we should submit to an unknown fear."*

How justly does this passage censure that spirit, which assuming to be philosophical, explains away the operations of the Internal World into States of the Brain, Deceptions of the Senses, or Impostures. This is, indeed, "*ensconcing themselves into seeming knowledge*," on the part of the "philosophical persons," who really ought to know that every true thing is simulated, and that indeed the simulation is in itself a testimony to some underlying truth.

Mr. Coleridge has made a remark upon Shakespeare's use of the word "*causeless*" in Lafcu's speech, which I will here transcribe.

"Shakespeare, inspired, as it might seem, with all wisdom, here uses the word "*Causeless*," in its strict philosophical sense, (cause being truly predicable only of *Phenomena*, that is, things natural, and not of *Noumena*, or things supernatural.)"

This is an excellent observation of Mr. Coleridge's, and

* This passage is generally printed with the comma after "*things*," instead of after "*familiar*," a most unfortunate mistake. "*Modern*" is here used by Shakespeare for "*common*."

points out also to us, that the "*submit to unknown fears,*" of the next sentence, is not to be understood in the low sense of any intellectual prostration, but as answering to the transcendental "*Causeless.*"

As the Character which speaks, must always be considered in estimating Shakespeare's meaning, it may be observed, that Lafeu is painted as a humorous, and also as a wise and good man. He is on the freest terms with the worthy king; and even the wild young Lord, Bertram, is made to say, "I do know him well, and common speech gives him a worthy pass." There is certainly something exquisite in his sly, good-humored hit at the "philosophical persons;" and he still carries on the same strain, while exulting in the king's wonderful cure, after being, as he observes, "*relinquished of the Artists, of all the learned and authentic fellows.*" It is evident how much he would have rejoiced at some of the wonderful cures wrought in our own day, by means of Mesmerism, Hypnotism, and Homœopathy, to the infinite discomfiture of our "learned and authentic fellows."

If Shakespeare himself had been a "philosophical person," he never could have written Lafeu's speeches. In them he has shewn that he saw clean thro' the skeptical spirit, a thing impossible for a skeptic to do.

SHAKESPEARE'S IDEA OF TRUE ART.

It will, we may presume, be conceded, that whatever is essentially true of one of the Fine Arts, must also be true of the others; and it is proposed to test this, by taking Hamlet's advice to the Players, wherein proof is given of the Author's views of the Artistic in Acting, and substituting for the word *Playing*, the word *Poetry*.

“ Let your discretion be your Tutor ; suit the Action to the word, the word to the Action, with this special observance, that you o’erstep not the modesty of Nature ; for anything so done is from the purpose of *Poetry*, whose end, both at the first, and now, was, and is, to hold, as ’twere, the Mirror up to Nature ; to show Virtue her own feature, Scorn her own Image, and the very age and body of the time, its form and pressure. Now this, overdone, or come tardy off, tho’ it make the unskilful laugh, cannot but make the judicious grieve ; the censure of which one, must, in your allowance, o’erweigh a whole theatre of others ”

Now assuming that these were Shakespeare’s own views upon *Playing*, and it does not seem likely that in this place he would make Hamlet speak otherwise than sensibly ; can it be doubted that he would also have applied such views to the *Poem to be played* : yet if a Ghost be only the product of a diseased brain, and the appearance of a Ghost to three persons at once a sheer impossibility, “ the modesty of Nature ” has been very much “ o’erstept ” in the Poem of Hamlet ; and if the end of all the Arts is, “ to hold, as ’twere, the mirror up to Nature,” what can be more “ overdone,” according to the Skeptical Philosophy.

Nevertheless, Hamlet does not yet seem to have made the judicious “ grieve,” and even those who think an Apparition only a state of the brain, feel that a powerful effect has been produced, altho’ on any sound principle of Artistic Reasoning, nothing but displeasure should ensue in the minds of those who think that in any given work, the Mirror has *not* been held up to Nature.

In the meanwhile, the Ghost-Believer thinks himself fully justified in pronouncing Hamlet to be “ an excellent Play, well digested in the Scenes, set down with as much modesty as cunning.”

SHAKESPEARE AND HIS ADMIRERS.

The practice of insisting upon Ghost-Belief as being a mere Superstition, does certainly seem to place Shakespeare's most able and zealous Admirers *in a false position*, when treating of him as an *Artist*. But let them be heard in their own words. 1st. Mr. Morgan, in his excellent Essay upon the Character of Falstaff, thus expresses himself in a note :—

“Ghosts differ from other imaginary beings, in this; that they belong to no Element, have no specific Nature or character, and are effects, however harsh the expression, supposed to be without a cause; the reason of which is, that they are not the creation of the Poet, but the servile Copies or transcripts of popular imagination, connected with supposed Reality and Religion. Should the Poet assign the true cause, and call them the mere painting or *coinage of the brain*, he would disappoint his own end, and destroy the being he had raised. Should he assign fictitious causes, and add a specific Nature and a local habitation, it would not be endured; or the effect would be lost by the conversion of one thing into another. The approach to reality in this case defeats all the arts and managements of fiction.

Let us compare this Critique upon Ghosts with Shakespeare's treatment of the Ghost in Hamlet. He has there given him a most specific character, that of an injured man seeking for Revenge. It sounds strangely, too, to hear a professor of Christianity speaking of what is understood to be the Soul of a deceased man, as of an Effect without a Cause; and then we are called upon to think that a great Poet could make *servile copies* from popular Imaginations, when the truth is, that all great Artists make it their delight to copy Nature, even to the minutest details, well knowing that *in no other way can lasting effects be produced*. That anything weak or false, or the copy of

such things, should produce great Artistic effects, is against all sound reasoning; and we therefore conclude, that when the philosophical Skeptic denies a Ghost, he does so merely from his *Intellect*, which is very like to be in the wrong, and not from his *Feelings*, the ultimate test of all works of Art.

Altho' the Ghost in Hamlet has every mark of reality, yet the local habitation, by which Mr. Morgan means a place in the External World, was not needed for him. His place was in the Spiritual World, and Hamlet and his friends saw him with their spiritual eyes, at the same time that the Platform was beheld by their natural eyes. That such was the case Shakespeare knew perfectly well, and this accounts for the Queen not being able to see the Ghost altho' Hamlet did. The Ghost did not wish her to see him, and therefore he did not present himself to her spiritual eyes. Shakespeare knew that Man is an inhabitant of *Two Worlds*, and consequently that all these things involved the gravest Truths. Were it not so, and that they were merely the *servile copies of false imaginations*, they would justly offend every cultivated mind, but we have daily experience that they do not do so.

2dly. Mr. Coleridge speaks of "this Ghost as a Superstition connected with the most mysterious Truths of revealed Religion, and Shakespeare's consequent reverence in his treatment of it." Here again the Ghost-Believer has an uncomfortable sensation. A Superstition, that is a weakness and a falsity, seems to have but little claim for *reverential* treatment from a great Artist. Why could not Mr. Coleridge have said "*a Truth connected with the most mysterious Truths of revealed Religion?*"

3dly. * Lessing says "Voltaire has regarded the ap-

* Quoted by Dr. Drake.—(Memorials of Shakespeare.)

pearance of a dead person as a Miracle,* and Shakespeare as a natural event. Which of the two thought most as a Philosopher is a question that we have nothing to do with. But the Englishman thought most as a Poet."

Here we have the pleasing admission that Shakespeare has treated the appearance of the Ghost as a part of *the true system of things*, which is implied in the phrase "a natural event." But why does Lessing say, that whether this was philosophical or not, is a question with which we have nothing to do? and why a distinction between Philosophy and Poetry, which seems to imply, that what was bad in the one, *might* be good in the other? Is that good Philosophy? and have we not everything to do with the question in estimating Shakespeare as an Artist? When the Soothsayer in Antony and Cleopatra, is asked "I't you, Sir, that know things," he significantly replies,

"In Nature's infinite book of Secresy,
A little I can read."

Can it be doubted that Shakespeare would not have said for himself what he has written for the Soothsayer? Surely not; and in that "infinite book of Secresy," he would find all that he has written.

4thly. Mr. Charles Knight, speaking of the appearance of the Ghost to Hamlet, observes, that "the images are of this world, and are not of this world. They belong at once to *popular Superstition*, and the *highest Poetry*." Mr. Knight soon after makes some remarks connected with which a few words are requisite.

"How exquisite," says he, "are the last lines of the Ghost; full of the Poetry of external nature, and of the depth of human affection, as if the Spirit that had for so

* In his Semiramis.

short a time been cut off from life, to know the secrets of 'the prison house,' still clung to the earthly remembrance of the beautiful and the tender, that even a Spirit might indulge."

"The glow-worm shews the Matin to be near,
And 'gins to pale his uneffectual fire,
Adieu, adieu, Hamlet! remember me."

The point here to be touched upon is as follows:—The Skeptic may say to the Ghost-Believer, "How, upon your own showing, could a Spirit who has left the earthly body, the mortal coil, be cognizant, as Shakespeare has made this Ghost, of the objects of the earthly world? You, the Ghost-Believers, plainly inculcate in your Philosophy, that each world *to be objectively known*, requires the Spiritual, or the Natural Organs, as the case may be.

To this objection, which is, indeed, a most obvious one, it is replied, that the solution is easy, and the proof of *kindred facts* within the reach of every one.

A Philosopher, who was also a Seer, has observed, that altho' a Spirit assuredly cannot, of himself, see the natural world, he can do so, when in communication, or as the Mesmerist would say, in *rapport*, with a Man or Men. He then, thro' *their* natural organs, perceives what they perceive, and that such communication between two persons, is a mere fact, is known to all who have paid any attention to Mesmerism.*

* Apropos of Mesmerism, there is a little Dialogue in Macbeth, which seems to show that Shakespeare had considered the fact of Disorders being cured by the Touch, or by what Dr. Mead so happily called "a sanative contagion." Had Shakespeare, as it is but too common to do, contemptuously disregarded such ideas, upon what Artistic Principle could he have written the conversation, which perhaps, as far as regards the action of the Play, is superfluous, if not indeed retarding, and which is, I believe, omitted in performance.

In Mesmeric cases, a person thrown into the Sleep, shall taste the eatable or drinkable which is being partaken of by one with whom he is in *rapport*; he shall hear the voice of such, but not of others, and so on.

In the fine effect then which Shakespeare has here produced, and which has called forth such praise from Mr. Knight, he still does not "o'er step the modesty of Nature." He knew better than ever to aim at an effect by so doing.

THE ARMOUR OF THE GHOST.

Not long since, a Lecture on Hamlet was delivered by a gentleman who is himself a Poet, and who informed his audience that his admiration of that work had led him literally to commit it to memory. It was very curious to hear the manner in which the Lecturer handled the *conduct* of the Play, for contrary to the usual custom, he raised the question of the Author's Beliefs.

It was very evident, that in the midst of the most profound admiration for Shakespeare, the speaker was perplexed in the extreme, between his own conviction that it

If he thought such things impossible, what reason could he have had, in this instance, for throwing away his fine poetry upon a falsity? If, however, we believe, that he, as a Student of Nature, knew the possibility of such facts, all is accounted for, and he might have written the Dialogue to please himself, and the *Reader* of the Poem. It may be observed, that he makes Malcolm say, that he has often *seen* the work done, and Shakespeare does not usually put in his little touches at random. Macbeth. A. iv. S. 3. Malcolm and Macduff. —To them enter a Doctor.

was impossible that Shakespeare could have believed in the Supernatural; and, on the other hand, that powerful air of reality which he saw pervaded the work. He closed his address by saying, that Shakespeare, like every true Philosopher, must have been *without fixed opinions* on such subjects, and that his state must have been one of mere doubt. "I need scarcely say, that I understood this to be the Lecturer's own position, and could hardly help thinking that the mere fact of a Skeptic, also a man of talent, and a poet, being thus perplexed with Hamlet, was, in itself, almost enough to prove that it had been written by one in a very different mental state.

The point, however, for which this Lecture is specially alluded to, was this. "*Where,*" said the Speaker, "*did the Ghost procure his Armour?*"

It is a favourite thing with Skeptics, to raise objections founded upon the Clothing of Ghosts, and shews their singular tendency to beg every question, instead of reasoning it. They never seem to consider, that even in the Natural World, Men do not use Clothing merely for Decency and Defence, which are indeed, very good reasons, and apply equally to Ghosts, admitting, only for argument's sake, their existence. Clothing is used also for its beauty, and above all, for its great significancy. The love of Dress has a noble origin, and, at the least, it implies the desire to *appear* worthily.

"If only to go warm were gorgeous,
Why nature needs not what thou wear'st,
Which scarcely keeps thee warm.—KING LEAR.

Again, no piece of Clothing can be made by hands, without being first contrived *in* and *by the Soul*, according to some end. If the Internal World and its inhabitants be *Realities*, the marvel would be the want of Clothing for

the latter, and if they had it not, the Skeptics would be the first to see, and justly to ridicule, the incongruity.

The question which should be asked, is not, "where does the Armour, &c., come from?" but, "is there an *Internal Causal World*, in which, as such, there must be all that there is in the *External, Effect World*."

THE GHOST IN MACBETH.

IN an Essay upon the Play of Macbeth, the following passage occurs, relative to the Ghost of Banquo. (See Fraser's Magazine, November, 1840.)

"if we believe in the reality of the Ghost, as a shape or shadow existent *without* the mind of Macbeth, and not exclusively within it, we shall have difficulties which may be put under two heads. Why did the Ghost come? Why did he go, on Macbeth's approach and at his bidding? It is clear from the Scene, that Macbeth drove it away, and also that he considered it as much an illusion as his wife would have fain had him when she whispered about the air-drawn dagger."

The above is cited on account of its mode of testing the question of *Objective Reality*. With Skeptics, very curiously, a Ghost is always expected to be thoroughly reasonable, tho' Men are not always so. What, however, we would earnestly request of the Skeptic, is to do with these things, as he would with any branch of natural Science, that is, inquire into facts. He would then find that the instances are indeed numerous, in which persons, just deceased, appear to those whom they have known, and then quickly disappear.

These passing manifestations also occasionally take

place, when the person appearing, is not either dead or dying: neither does it follow necessarily that the person seeing, or as the Skeptic would say, fancying that he sees, must always be thinking of the one seen. An examination into the general facts, leads to the conclusion, that thought of the person appeared to, on the part of the one appearing, is the cause, according to certain Laws of the Internal World, of the manifestation. This Theory, and its facts, must be considered in judging of Shakespeare's intentions. Of him we should always think as of the Artist, and the Student of Nature, until it can be shown that he ever forgets himself in those characters.

THE GHOST IN HAMLET.—DR. JOHNSON.

OF the Ghost in Hamlet, Dr. Johnson remarks, that "he left the regions of the dead to but little purpose," and this is seemingly a critical objection in the Dr.'s opinion.

Now as it is impossible but that Shakespeare must have known that such an objection might be offered, we have, it is submitted, an additional presumption as to *his* view of the case.

If he believed, or rather knew, that every Ghost is a Man, and every Man a Ghost, his conduct of the Story is altogether artistlike. The Ghost is actuated by a just desire (in a Pagan sense) for revenge of his great injury. It does not appear, that he either knew, or sought to know, what other consequences might flow from what he was doing. We may be sure that during his earthly life he would have done likewise, as the mere fact that a Man has "shuffled off the mortal coil," does not alter his Inner

Nature. Had Shakespeare simply written for what is called *effect*, it would have appeared to him, as it has to many, inconsistent that the supernatural appearance should so far fail as to cause, not only the death of several innocent people, but also that of Hamlet himself.

Let us cease to consider the Supernatural as being either the *Suspension* or the *Contradiction* of material, external Laws, but as the *Manifestation*, according to Law, of *Spiritual, Internal Laws*. We shall not then find ourselves exclaiming, "Why should the Divine permit his Laws to be *suspended* or *contradicted* for this or that insufficient end? and then, on the strength of our own assumptions, refusing to examine into facts, and often putting forth very unjust Criticisms upon the works of the greatest Artists, Men whom we ought, even for our own sakes, to be slow indeed in pronouncing to be wrong.



ANTIGONUS.—HOTSPUR.

IN a volume entitled "Philosophy of Shakespeare," by Mr. W. H. Rankin, in which passages from the Author are ranged under certain headings, with occasional remarks, Mr. R. thus expresses himself:—

"Shakespeare's superiority to the superstitious times in which he lived, is absolutely amazing, especially when we consider that such a mind as Sir M. Hale's succumbed to them. Read the speech of Antigonus on Ghosts, the reasoning of Hotspur on Omens, . . . and then admire a Genius that was centuries in advance of his own age"

On the other hand, Mr. Birch, who wrote a book to show that Shakespeare was a Skeptic in Religion, and a

Materialist in Philosophy, adduces these very things in support of *his* point. In the meanwhile, both gentlemen utterly forget that Antigonus, who informs us that he is a skeptic, *is shown in the Play to be quite wrong*, at least for once. The dream, which had so much wrought upon him, as to make him say, after having pronounced "*Dreams to be toys*" that he will, nevertheless, be superstitiously squared by this, is *fulfilled*, and the just inference is, that the Skepticism belongs to Antigonus alone, the Belief to the writer of the work. Those who have really gone into the subject, know what powerful evidence there is for the fact of *Prophetic Dreams*, and are satisfied that Shakespeare knew it also. Those who think that Shakespeare would introduce a prophetic dream, without studying the subject of prophetic dreams, are requested to consider that a Painter who loves his Art, and seeks for lasting reputation, does not allow himself to introduce anything into his picture, even the meanest weed, without studying it.

The case with respect to Hotspur equally illustrates the strange forgetfulness of Mr. Rankin and Mr. Birch. In the fine Scene between Hotspur and Glendower there is a great deal of smart, cutting Skepticism evinced by the former. He is, however, checkt by Mortimer, who assures him that Glendower is "a worthy gentleman, exceedingly well read, and profited in strange concealments." And how does Shakespeare carry on the Scene? Why, *by making Glendower give an auricular proof* of his open communication with the Inner World. When Mortimer says that he will sit and hear his wife sing, Glendower replies—

"Do so ;

And those Musicians that shall play to you
Hang in the air a thousand leagues from hence ;
Yet straight they shall be here : sit, and attend."

He then speaks some Welsh words, and then the Music

plays. Does this produce any effect upon Hotspur's unbelief? Not in the least; and Shakespeare here gives absolute proof of his observation upon a certain species of Skepticism, which, instead of being at all moved to gravity or examination by some noteworthy fact, is only disposed to turn it into ridicule. Thus Hotspur, when he hears the Music, only says,

“*Now I perceive the devil understands Welsh ;*
And is no marvel, he's so humourous.
By'r Lady, he's a good Musician.”

Shakespeare has also kept to nature in not giving any remark upon Glendower's power to the other persons present, to whom, supposing that power to have been familiar, it had ceased to be marvellous. Had Shakespeare however been a skeptic, and yet so regardless of his own idea of truth as to have introduced the Spiritual Music, for the sake of something called *effect*, there could not have been this *quietness* of treatment; light jesting on the part of Hotspur, and absolute silence with the rest.

It may be added, that Mr. Charles Knight also, has evidently overlookt what Shakespeare has made Glendower *do*, and the unavoidable inference from it. Mr. Knight contrasts “the solemn *credulity*” of Glendower, with the “sarcastic *unbelief*” of Hotspur; but we have seen, that on Shakespeare's shewing, it should have been “solemn *Belief*,” not *Credulity*, which is to be affirmed of Glendower; for, in this scene, he not only believes that he can, and says that he will, do a certain thing, that is, summon Musicians of the Inner World, *but he actually does do it*.

It, is, certainly, a striking proof of the effect which preconceived opinions have upon Criticism, that these points in a writer like Shakespeare, should remain totally unnoticed, nay, *unseen*. Every one will admit, that in order to be a Critic upon Shakespeare, human nature must be

studied by the Critic, otherwise he cannot appreciate the Author's treatment of it. It remains to be admitted, that the manifestations of the Inner World must also be studied by the Critics for the same reason.

TROILUS.—THESEUS.

IN addition to the cases of Antigonus and Hotspur, those of Troilus and Theseus may be adduced, as fresh instances of the manner in which Shakespeare shows the Skeptic to be in error, *by placing him in opposition to the facts of the Story*. Thus Troilus treats his Brother Helenus, and his Sister Cassandra, very cavalierly, after the approved fashion of the Doubters.

"You are for Dreams and Slumbers, brother priest,"

he says to Helenus, and when Hector, upon the entrance of Cassandra, roving and prophesying, says:—

"Now, youthful Troilus, do not these high strains,
Of Divination in our Sister, work
Some touches of remorse."

The reply shews Troilus as only seeing that "Cassandra's mad," "her Raptures brainsick," &c., yet "the high strains of Divination" really were within her.

Finally, in the "Midsummer Night's Dream," Theseus makes a celebrated speech, every line of which is skeptical, yet the *conduct* of the Play falsifies the Duke's reasonings, or rather his assertions. Hippolyta having observed to him,

"'Tis strange, my Theseus, that these Lovers speak of;"

He thus replies, paying no attention, be it observed, to the fact that she is speaking from the testimony of four persons, a very artful stroke, on the part of the Author, at the Skeptics.

THESEUS.—“ More strange than true. I never may believe
 These antique fables, nor these fairy toys.
 Lovers and madmen have such seething brains,
 Such shaping fantasies, that apprehend
 More than cool reason ever comprehends.
The lunatic, the Lover, and the Poet,
 Are of imagination all compact ;
 One sees more devils than vast hell can hold—
 That is the Madman ; the Lover, all as frantic,
 Sees Helen’s beauty in a brow of Egypt ;
The Poet’s eye, in a fine frenzy rolling,
Doth glance from heaven to earth, from earth to heaven,
And, as imagination bodies forth
The forms of things unknown, the Poet’s pen
Turns them to shapes, and gives to airy nothing
A local habitation and a name.
 Such tricks hath strong imagination,
 That if it would but apprehend some joy,
 It comprehends some bringer of that joy ;
 Or in the night, imagining some fear,
 How easy is a bush supposed a bear ?”

To this speech Hippolyta very justly answers, that

“ All the story of the night told over,
And all their minds transfigured so together
 More witnesseth than fancy’s images,
 And grows to something of great constancy.”

Here again Shakespeare shows his nice observation of the skeptical mind. Every one who has conversed on any subject, with persons *predetermined, on that subject, not to*

believe, must have observed how common it is for the latter, when fairly brought to a stand still, to lapse into a dead silence, instead of saying, as a Lover of Truth would do, "what you have alleged is very reasonable, and I will now examine." *They* can say no more, nor may *you*. Accordingly, to the incontrovertible speech of Hippolyta, Theseus makes no reply.

It is truly remarkable that to the Skeptical Theseus should have been allotted *the skeptical idea concerning the Poet*, namely, as being *the embodier of the unreal*, and not as the Copyist of what is true. It is exactly in character that the doubting Theseus should thus speak of the Poetic Art, and thence we may be sure that the Poet who wrote the lines for him thought precisely the very reverse. Owing, however, to the general doubt concerning the Supernatural, and the consequent assumption of Shakespeare's disbelief, this point seems never to have been considered, and it may be safely affirmed that ninety-nine out of every hundred readers would gravely quote the lines upon the Poet, as containing Shakespeare's own idea,* altho' only five lines previously, *Theseus has placed the Poet in the same Category with the Lunatic*. From the purely dramatic nature of his Works, Shakespeare can never *speak* in his own person, but he can always *act*, that is, so frame his Story, that Skepticism shall be shewn to be entirely at fault.

* Mr. Macaulay has done so, in his Essay on Milton.

CONCLUSION.

In conclusion, the following Axioms are submitted to the consideration of those who are interested in Criticism upon Shakespeare.

1st. That all *Good Art* is *absolutely true*, or it could not be *Good*.

2nd. That to the true Artist, whatever he cannot feel to be *absolutely true* in its foundations, is altogether intolerable.

3d. That all the difficulty in *intellectually* admitting these things, lies in the non-admission of an Internal, ~~Causal~~ World, *as absolutely real*. It is said, in *intellectually* admitting, because the influence of the Arts proves that Men's *Feelings* always have admitted, and do still admit, this Reality.

4th. That neither pure Immaterialism (or Idealism) on the one hand, nor pure Materialism, on the other, can be considered but as *Half-Philosophies*, consequently that neither of them singly could have been the philosophy of a man like Shakespeare.*

* The Materialist, taking as his basis, certain undeniable facts of the Senses, constructs a System, which teaches that Mind is a *result* of organized Matter; but then this very Mind, by taking another series of facts, also undeniable, can completely destroy the philosophic objectivity of the material world, and that too by arguments of which Mr. Hume observed, that altho' they produce no conviction, they admit of no reply. Altho' Materialism and Idealism are thus each equally unfit to be called Philosophies, yet Materialism seems to be especially the growth of minds, however powerful in other respects, not competent to follow out certain species of reasoning. It is a fact,

5th. The great Artist is pre-eminently the man of fact and common sense. He sees more facts than other men, and also their commonsenseness.

6th. All Good Art takes both the Spiritual and the Natural Worlds for granted, and works with both, according to the Laws of both, and with such effect, that in spite of Skepticism, the Best Artists are, by common consent, placed above all other men ; and justly so. To be what they are, whether as Poets, Painters, or Musicians, they must not only have the most powerful sense of the Objective Realities of both Worlds, but they are also peculiarly gifted with *the faculty of fixing their perceptions*, so as to convey them to other Men.

that while every Idealist thoroughly comprehends the Materialist, and indeed cannot fail to do so, as the appeal is altogether to the external senses, the reverse is by no means the case. Who ever met with a profest Materialist who *understood* Berkely or Hume? No one ! Because whoever *really understands* them, either adopts Idealism, or takes both Worlds for granted, agreeably to the common sense of Mankind, and the practice of all the Great Artists.

